

A Glimpse of Early Nixon

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LAGUNA NIGUEL, Calif.—An examination of some of Richard M. Nixon's 600,000 personal papers and records released last week by the National Archives office provides a fascinating although sometimes sketchy glimpse of the early years of the ex-president's often stormy political career.

The papers constitute what is known as the "general correspondence" file kept by Nixon's aides before he became president. They contain hundreds of thousands of letters exchanged between Nixon and his friends, political supporters and campaign aides, as well as numerous staff memos, notes and reports accompanying them.

Included are extensive files on longtime Nixon associates such as Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo and evangelist Billy Graham, top political aides H. R. Haldeman and Murray Chotiner and well-known public figures, including Howard Hughes and columnist Drew Pearson.

The files were donated to the National Archives in 1968 and 1969 by Nixon, who subsequently requested they be made available for public inspection. However, the released material—828 boxes of indexed materials—is less than a fourth of the 2.6 million papers accumulated by Nixon from his first congressional campaign in 1946 to his election as president in 1968.

Many of the files have significant gaps, a result of archives staff editing to protect "national security" or Nixon's privacy. Still, the remaining material provides a wealth of anecdotal insight into the former president's early political years.

There is, for example, an "E. Howard Hunt" file, which consists of Hunt's business card from the American embassy in Mexico, where he was stationed for the CIA during the mid-1950s. On the back of the card, which Hunt sent to Nixon in 1958, he writes, "My wife and I want to thank you for the magnificent job you're doing for our country."

The card is stapled to a plain white sheet of paper on which a Nixon aide had scrawled, "Any idea who this might be?"

Another file contains correspondence with Dana C. Smith, a southern California businessman who engineered the 1952 "Nixon fund," which the then-vice president defended in his famous "Checkers speech."

In one series of letters, Nixon (in response to a request from Smith) asked a U.S. embassy official in Cuba to "assist" Mr. Smith with what the official

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called some "trouble Mr. Smith had at the Sans Souci nightclub in Habana." There was no further elaboration on the "trouble."

The embassy official subsequently sent a letter dated Sept. 29, 1952, to Smith that includes information on the club-casino and the game of "Cubolo," and a list of Cuban attorneys. "The embassy would have no information on gambling odds at the 'Cubolo' game as conducted at Sans Souci," however, the official told Smith.

One of the largest collections of pa-

pers is found in files marked "Smears," where Nixon staffers collected allegations of smear tactics conducted by both political parties. One of the file folders contains dozens of letters written by Nixon staffers to concerned constituents during Nixon's unsuccessful 1960 presidential race.

In the letters, the Nixon aides deny variously that Nixon is "anti-Semitic" or a member of the NAACP, assure that he does not use "tobacco in any form" or own any interest in a "brewery or distilling corporation," does not plan to send his children to "Catholic schools," or appoint an ambassador to the Vatican, and "has not attended a bullfight in any of the countries he has visited."

Another folder labeled "Smears (the ballad of Richard Nixon)" contains information on a 1950s song poking fun at the vice president. A "memorandum" to Nixon from a staffer, dated March 16, 1956, details the backgrounds of the song's authors, noting one had been a writer for a "communist magazine" and another "is known as an active supporter of Americans for Democratic Action."

The memorandum also notes, "the term 'Tricky Dick,' used in the song, has been found from time to time in the Daily Worker," a leading communist journal.

Another entry in the "smears" files is a letter by a Nixon official suggesting that someone "check" into a group called the "National Bundles for Nixon Committee," an apparently bogus operation set up by Nixon enemies during the 1952 presidential campaign.

The "committee" had sent out a bro-

chure to voters using the address of Nixon's campaign headquarters and urging them to forgo monetary contributions in favor of donations to Nixon of a "\$30,000 mortgage on two new houses," a "classy new car, imported," or "liquor" that Nixon could provide to the press.

Other files have been more severely edited. The Rebozo file, for example, has had some documents "withdrawn" from it for reasons of privacy.

What remains is a two-inch-thick pile of rather uninformative letters, including a thank-you note from Rebozo for a set of vice-presidential "ashtrays" and congratulations from Nixon for Rebozo's shooting "a 100 golf game."

Evangelist Billy Graham was also a regular letter writer to Nixon, usually offering his moral support and prayers during one of Nixon's periodic political crises.

In one letter, however, Graham suggests that Nixon endorse for U.S. Congress a man who had just given a speech on "The World Communist Conspiracy." In response to Graham's letter, Nixon sent a memo to a staff member asking him to politely refuse the suggestion and adding, "I don't know how he got into this!"

The largest entry in the file of former senator George Smathers (D-Fla.)—a long-time friend of Nixon—concerns what one Nixon aide dubbed in a 1956 memo the "Fruit of the Month Club."

The reference is to Smathers having arranged for the Nixon family to re-

ceive crates of grapefruit on a regular basis from a friend of his in Florida.

The file contains 10 letters from Nixon written over a six-year period thanking Smathers for the delicious Florida grapefruit, which Nixon says his family enjoys eating immensely.

Attached to copies of the thank-you notes are various memos written by beleaguered Nixon staffers forwarding the crates of grapefruit to other aides, friends, and in one instance, to "the post office fellows who have been handling these shipments for us."

Drew Pearson, who regularly targeted Nixon in his syndicated column, "Washington Merry-G-Round" also received a great deal of attention in the papers. In Pearson's file is an extensive collection of his columns and radio broadcasts, and numerous letters to the editor from Nixon staffers protesting Pearson's remarks.

In one letter Nixon sent to 15 mem-

bers of Congress on Aug. 1, 1947, he noted recent attacks Pearson had made on them and offered his "congratulations!" He added, "I am confident that your rating among the great majority of your colleagues will be even higher than in the past."

The files are incomplete, according to Ken Rossman, chief of the National Archives branch here, because Nixon retained for himself all correspondence with foreign dignitaries, as well as a handful of prominent national leaders, including John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. and J. Edgar Hoover.

Moreover, the files were edited substantially by the archives staff as part of an agreement with Nixon. The agreement, which Rossman describes as standard, specified that any information violating "national security" or constituting an "invasion of privacy" is to be "withdrawn" from public circulation.